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3.5(c) ARGENTINA: Tension in Government

The shooting incident involving Argentine warships and Soviet and Bulgarian trawlers over the weekend may have resulted from the increasing pressure on President Videla by his junta partner, naval chief Admiral Massera. Videla has maneuvered cautiously for more than a year to consolidate his political position and enjoys substantial support within and outside the military, but greater friction among the junta members will make it more difficult to agree on and implement national policy.//

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Massera, probably to enhance his political prestige, ordered Argentine warships to fire on the fishing trawlers when they were encroaching on the country's 200-mile territorial limit. Whether by coincidence or design, the Navy has lately made a show of appearing to be the leading defender of national sovereignty.

3.5(c) According to unconfirmed press reports, two of the four fishing vessels were badly damaged, and at least one fisherman was wounded. Argentine destroyers had recently seized five Soviet trawlers, an exploit that was highly publicized by the Argentine media. In addition, the Foreign Ministry--controlled by the Navy--delivered a stiff protest to Chile over alleged violations of territorial waters and unauthorized flights over southern Argentina, an area of national sensitivity because of the continuing boundary quarrel with Chile.

3.5(c) Massera will no doubt seek to exploit these incidents. He has already made the pointed declaration that the Navy is prepared to preserve the geographic integrity of Argentina, a self-serving statement clearly designed for domestic political purposes.

3.5(c) Massera has previously tried to unsettle Videla, whom he considers indecisive, ineffective, and too willing to compromise. In recent months, Massera has become openly critical of the administration's economic policies and of statements by Videla alluding to the pre-eminence of the Army.

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Interservice rivaly, particularly between the Army and Navy, is characteristic of the Argentine armed forces, where personal ambitions sometimes aggravate ideological or policy differences. Massera has long disapproved of what he views as the Army's predominance, both in the junta and throughout the government.

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In addition to its image-building exercises, the Navy is rumored to have engineered a number of recent incidents intended to discredit Videla. The small magazine *Conviccion*--
3.3(b)(1) which is believed linked to the Navy--published an attack on Videla's trip to Washington, likening the signers of the declaration of support for the Panama Canal treaty to "lackeys" heeding a call from the "boss."

3.5(c) Regardless of whether Videla blames the Navy for these incidents, he recognizes them as attempts to discredit his regime and is apparently determined to put an end to such activity. An executive order banned *Conviccion* from publishing for three months.

3.5(c) In two heretofore rare instances of "going public" on matters related to the internal security situation, the government recently acknowledged that it was detaining a prominent union leader and human rights advocate and also a Jewish family suspected of subversive connections. Such official admissions were seldom made when the government was less attentive to human rights; in the context of Argentine politics the public statements represent a victory for the moderate point of view that Videla
3.5(c) espouses.

The consensus within the military for Videla's rule has always been fragile, and with Massera increasingly open in his criticism, the President must move with caution on all fronts to maintain support both for himself and for the Army.

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